The Prospects of Development Education in African Countries: Building a Critical Mass of Citizenry for Civic Engagement

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Abstract: This article argues that development education is often framed in an African context within notions of national citizenship designed to engender support for public institutions and policies rather than develop critical thinking skills. This limited concept and application of development education often results in public apathy and disengagement from participation in community, national and global development initiatives. The author argues that recourse to the more radical, Freirean conception of development education practice in African states could potentially support more engaged public activism in issues underpinning poverty and injustice locally and globally. The author draws upon his knowledge and experience of the public sector in Ghana and general trends across Africa to propose potentially fertile areas of research that could support more effective DE practice that nurtures enhanced civic engagement.

Key words: Active citizenship; development education; Africa; Ghana; critical thinking skills; research.

One of the core aims of development education (DE) is anchored in the promotion of an understanding of global development issues and fostering the emergence of informed and active global citizens (Irish Aid, 2006). However, much of what is known about DE in connection to its global citizenship agenda relates to the global North, especially Europe, though ideals and programmes of DE exist in different shades and often in less critical forms in African countries. DE in the global North is historically rooted in non-government organisation (NGO) education activities for both formal and informal education audiences, aimed at rallying public support for development in the global South (McCloskey, 2014), but over time DE has

adopted a critical lens on aid programmes, with the introduction of themes of power, social justice and equality into its narrative (Bourn, 2014).

In the public sector of African countries, however, DE is often framed in notions of national citizenship, embodied in public institutions with mandates to whip up citizens' sense of patriotism, promote citizen participation in electoral processes, community voluntarism and payment of taxes. The missing dimension of DE as implemented in African countries, compared to DE as conceptualised and practiced in Europe, is the critical dimension on development issues that underpin global poverty and injustice. Such DE efforts are often aimed at engendering interest and actions in civic engagements and political participation at both the local and global levels to foster social justice. This article argues that, with global citizenship education (GCE), DE in some African countries can be made more critical and given an active role in building a critical mass to strengthen public participation in actions that demand good governance and accountability both locally and globally.

The article will first critique governance in African countries in relation to civic engagement and political participation. With a short historical narrative on citizenship education in Africa, the ways in which DE programmes have been conceptualised and implemented in some African countries will be discussed. A brief description of what GCE entails will be given in the third section of the paper and, with the African context in mind, the challenges that DE is faced with in African countries will be considered. The conclusion will propose fertile research areas in connection to the effective use of DE in promoting citizen-state civic engagements. Discussions and analysis in this paper are focused on DE policies and practices promoted in the public sector of Ghana, and in the wider context of African countries.

A critique of governance vis-à-vis civic engagement and political participation in African countries

Accountability, transparency and citizen participation in governance have been widely acknowledged as key ingredients of democracy. It has also been noted that, there is a trilateral relationship between civic engagement, participation in local politics and good governance, and that each of these elements acts to reinforce the other to produce desirable democratic outcomes (Mohammad, Norazizan and Shahvandi, 2011). This recognition has brought good governance centre stage in global development efforts, but has yet to translate significantly into real democratic benefits. The deficit in democratic governance in some developing countries is evident in the declining levels of confidence in representative democracy and the increasing disillusionment of people over their governments' inability to represent their interests and service their needs adequately (Joakim and Amnä, 2012). Efforts by the UN to prioritise local participation in development initiatives and civic engagements in the post-2015 development framework are an acknowledgement of the significance of good governance in global development efforts. As Baillie Smith (2013) has argued, the broadening of citizen engagements in the global South should be a defining feature of the post-2015 development agenda.

A survey conducted on citizen-state engagement in Ghana is revealing in what it tells us about the current trends in political participation and civic engagement in one African state. A 2014 Afrobarometer survey on the attitude of Ghanaians towards local political participation showed that '58 percent of Ghanaians have never attended a community meeting, and 63 percent have never joined others to raise issues in the past year' (Armah-Attoh, Ampratwum and Paller, 2014: 2). In the area of citizen engagement with the state, the survey revealed that, in the past year, 89 percent of Ghanaians did not make contact with a government official, 86 percent did not contact their MP, 85 percent did not make contact with a political party official and 68 percent did not invite their local government representative to take up an important problem facing their community on their behalf. From the same survey, a majority of the respondents (91 percent) indicated that

they have never refused to pay taxes and other forms of fees to the state, and from that total, only 15 percent said they would evade the payment of taxes if they had the opportunity to do so.

The survey briefing paper further points to the fact that, nine out of ten (90 percent of) Ghanaians 'strongly agree' or 'agree' that tax authorities always have the right to make people pay taxes (ibid: 4). The point of convergence in the findings of the Afrobarometer survey and the central claim of this article is that the forms of DE delivered in some African countries focus more on raising awareness and the promotion of civic duties in areas such as payment of taxes and voting, to the neglect of building the civic competencies of the citizenry to engender their interest in civic engagement in promoting good and democratic governance. In this regard, the article contends that existing DE programmes in the public sector of some African countries promote the building of 'good' citizens rather than 'critically engaged' citizens (Honohan, 2004 cited in Khoo, 2006: 29), and argues for an incorporation of a critical global pedagogy in the citizenship education promoted by public sector institutions in these countries.

Forms of development education in the public sector of African countries

The influence of historical, social, political and cultural forces in the conceptualisation and delivery of citizenship education programmes in all contexts has been noted by Capelle, Crippin and Lundgren (2011). This explains why in the context of African communitarian cultures, the aims of civic education policies and programmes over the years have taken on a communitarian outlook, in line with African communitarian values. Before Africa's colonial contact with the western world, there existed indigenous citizenship education which was collectivist in nature, and aimed at producing 'acceptable and useful' individuals in African communities (Mhauli, 2012: 106). It has also been noted by Mhlauli that citizenship education was virtually non-existent in African countries during the colonial era because the colonial project was not aimed at developing a critical citizenry. The immediate postcolonial era therefore did not see any serious

widespread efforts to champion citizenship education, except in rare cases where for the purposes of garnering public support and loyalty for military juntas and civilian dictators, there were some forms of political education delivered to the people.

Much later in the decolonisation process, however, the post-colonial governments of Africa were faced with the task of promoting national unity and cohesion in efforts to bring different ethnic groups and political units together for national development, and they achieved this through the incorporation of citizenship education into the school curricula, as well as the establishment of public institutions to inculcate values of patriotism and nationalism in their citizenry. One such continent-wide effort to promote national unity and cohesion through the school curricula found expression in the design of the African Social Studies Programme (ASSP) which saw the introduction of Social Studies into African schools following a 1968 Mombasa Conference (EDC/CREDO, 1968). The consequences of African colonialism included educational policies and systems that were largely focused on ensuring citizens' unquestioning allegiance to the state for nation-building (Okoth and Ayango, 2014). It is this post-colonial agenda of citizenship education that still underpins DE activities in most African countries today, driven mainly by public sector institutions. The next section looks at the example of citizenship education in Ghana.

Citizenship Education in Ghana

Public sector efforts to promote citizenship education in Ghana are mainly driven at two levels: through the activities of a constitutionally established body called the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), and through Ghana's formal school curriculum. The mandate vested in the NCCE to carry out citizenship education in Ghanaian society is derived from Articles 231-239 of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana and the National Commission for Civic Education Act, 1993, Act 452 (NCCE, cited in Abudu and Fuseini, 2014). It is clear from these constitutional articles that the explicit mandate conferred on the NCCE to promote citizenship education is limited broadly to raising awareness within Ghanaian society to

ensure that the citizenry defend and uphold the Constitution of Ghana as 'the fundamental law of the people of Ghana' (GoG, 1992) and to educate the citizenry on their civic responsibilities and rights. In a recently published paper by Abudu and Fuseini (2014) on civic awareness and engagement in Ghana, they capture some of the NCCE's priority for education and awareness-raising as follows:

- rights and responsibilities of Ghanaians as citizens;

- democratic values such as tolerance and cooperation;

- electoral processes;

- engagement in community service;

- principal economic and social policies of the state; and

- the operations of government (Executive, Judiciary, Legislature).

In the Ghanaian formal school system, citizenship education is taught at different levels and incorporated in different ways into the school curriculum; with some levels having citizenship education as a stand-alone subject whilst in other cases aspects of citizenship education are integrated as topics into different subject areas. In primary school, citizenship education is taught to pupils at the upper primary level, and at junior and senior high school levels is taught through Social Studies. The opening statement of the rationale for teaching citizenship education, as captured in the teaching syllabus for citizenship education (Primary classes 4-6) states that, 'Citizenship Education is a subject that aims at producing competent, reflective, concerned and participatory citizens who will contribute to the development of the communities and country in the spirit of patriotism and democracy' (MoESS, 2007:II). The topics contained in the syllabus include:

- values and responsibilities in our community;

- the national symbols and me, my community;

- skills for effective citizenship;

- basic rights of human beings;

- peer groups and nation-building;

- attitudes and responsibilities for nation-building;

- one people one nation;

- governance in Ghana;

- how to become a democratic citizen; and

- Ghana and her neighbours.

It can be gleaned from the awareness-raising activities of the NCCE that they are inward looking and lack a global dimension. The topics contained in the teaching syllabus for citizenship education also show that, though some of the topics relate to issues of justice, sustainability, human rights and gender, there are no linkages made to issues in a global context, which is vital in developing active global citizens. In order to build a strong case for a global perspective in citizenship education in African countries, further research is needed to assess current provision of the global dimension in learning provided through the school curricula.

Pedagogy of global citizenship education

It has been said that if education will meet the needs of twenty-first century learners, it must prepare them to critically engage with the world in meaningful ways (Fiedler, 2008). This observation amongst others underscore the need for a re-examination of traditional approaches to conceptualising and delivering citizenship education in African states, given

the increasingly globalised nature of today's world. Global citizenship education is understood as an educational agenda that seeks to promote a critical understanding of globalisation and reflection on the implications of our global interconnectedness and interdependence to engender action towards improving and sustaining desirable global conditions (Pashby, 2012). In conceptualising what GCE is, authors have noted that it moves beyond a social-studies approach that tends to 'tokenise and exoticise foreign places and peoples' (Pashby, 2012: 9), and offers learning experiences that 'open up minds' to a deep and critical global vision based on equality and social justice (Bourn, 2014: 6). For GCE to bolster the interest of citizens in civic engagements on global issues it should develop in learners' critical thinking about complex global and development issues, whilst at the same time building the confidence of these learners to explore and express their own values and opinions on both local and global issues (Oxfam, 2006). The skills and capabilities engendered by GCE enable learners to think in critical, independent and constructive ways (Irish Aid, 2006). GCE seeks to impart a set of skills and knowledge for learners to be able to function effectively as useful citizens both at local and global levels.

Global citizenship education as promoted by DE also holds the prospect of introducing a postcolonial theory perspective into citizenship education that is delivered through the school curricula of African countries. As previously noted, postcolonial education in African countries was largely influenced by a colonialist agenda that sought to subjugate and silence critical African voices (Shizha, 2013), and these influences are reflected in the citizenship education that is delivered in African schools. Postcolonial theory offers an analytical framework which promotes global citizenship that engages with cultural differences and examines assumptions held about other cultures especially of the global South (Fiedler, 2007). In Young's analysis of postcolonial theory, he posits that it relates to the history of colonialism to the extent that historical forces have contributed to the shaping of power relations in society today (Rukundwa and van Aarde, 2008: 1174). Vanessa Andreotti has noted that postcolonial theory offers an educational agenda that envisions citizenship that is sensitive to the 'cultural and material effects of

uneven globalisation' (2007: 4). Postcolonial theory therefore contains the potential to challenge DE to provide spaces and analytical tools for learners in African countries to critically engage with global issues, whilst dealing with assumptions held by themselves and by people of the global North about countries of the global South.

Contextual challenges to development education in African countries

Some African postcolonial scholars (Ali, 2008; Ali, Elis and Sizha, 2005; Divala, 2007) have argued that citizenship education as practiced in most African countries was imposed on them by the western world, without recourse to the cultural dynamics of these countries. This may partly explain why the forms of citizenship education delivered in developing countries do not achieve much in engendering interest in civic engagements to curb corruption and improve governance. It has been observed by Tembo (2010) and Cammack (2007) that the promotion of good governance in Africa is significantly influenced by informal power and politics embedded in the social and cultural fabric of African countries, a situation that emanates from informal institutions operating side by side with formal state institutions, and often competing with these formal institutions. Gretchen Helmke and Steven Levitsky have defined informal institutions as 'socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside officially sanctioned channels' (cited in Carothers and De Gramont, 2011: 12).

One notable effect of informal power and politics on governance in Africa is that it weakens the interest and ability of the citizenry to demand good and accountable governance from people in power, with whom they may have familial relations. Citizenship education policies and programmes targeted at both school and community audiences must therefore take cognisance of the neopatrimonial influences of African cultures on governance, and find constructive ways of raising awareness and engendering action among the citizenry to check informal power influences that negatively impact on democratic governance and impede development (Cammack, 2007). The impact of informal practices on citizenship

development calls for utilising informal educational platforms to deliver citizenship education, especially to adult populations, in line with the traditional African style education. This education is focused on enhancing democratic awareness, whilst highlighting values of African political culture that frown on neopatrimonial practices that undermine development (Okoth and Anyango, 2014). Research into how DE can target the neopatrimonial forces that impede democratic governance in African countries could usefully determine the methodologies and approaches best suited to these countries.

The promotion of a Freirean model of DE using public sector institutions is likely to be met with political opposition within some African governments. Many of these governments have weak democratic structures with poor records of accountability and are likely to show little interest in supporting forms of citizenship education that seek to empower citizens to become critical agents of change. This challenge to DE has manifested itself even in the European context, where for example, aid funding for development awareness projects from the British government in 2010 was considerably reduced suggesting that countries in the global North are also wary of the critical awareness-raising role that the DE sector can play. By cutting the funding for development awareness projects, Hilary has suggested that the British government was removing 'an unwanted source of criticism' that was coming from the DE sector for its neoliberal economic policies that it argues are contributing to the deepening of global poverty and injustice (Hilary, 2013: 10).

In most African countries, weak political support for DE is likely to stifle the promotion of critical forms of citizenship education (Bräutigam and Knack, 2004). Though this article is not focused on the role of NGOs in the promotion of DE activities in developing countries, it should be noted that the NGO sector would probably be more effective at initial efforts in promoting GCE, given their relative autonomy and their track record in advocacy. Regarding the promotion of GCE by civil society organisations in African countries, further research is needed to determine the specific ways

these groups can engage with the peculiar conditions obtaining in African countries to promote GCE.

A criticism levelled against global citizenship is that it can lead to a neglect of participation in local and national development efforts (Chandler, 2004). A similar criticism is that GCE works against national patriotism and that efforts to promote global citizenship will undermine citizenship conferred by the nation-state (Rapoport, 2009). These fears may well be justified given the inequalities and injustices associated with globalisation in developing countries (Birdsall, 2006). In that light, GCE is suspected of harbouring elements of a neocolonial, imperialist and expansionist agenda to perpetuate an unjust global economic system for the Western world (Andreotti and de Souza, 2012; Pashby, 2012).

A close inspection of the aims of DE however will show that at its centre are discussions about the historical consequences of colonialism and the effects of unjust international trade policies on countries in the global South, as well as the increasing interdependence in today's world. DE argues that an understanding of globalisation is needed to prepare people for their roles as 'global citizens' in combating the inequalities that sometimes arise from globalisation (Finlay, 2006). In regard to the assertion that global citizenship will create a neglect of local development efforts, development educators will argue that one of the goals of GCE is to debate how global developments impinge on local conditions and vice versa. Though GCE involves creating learning experiences that engender actions toward desirable change in 'distant places and in different cultures', these actions are not pursued in isolation but in unity with local development. Global citizenship explores the linkages and relationships between the local and the global, the nature (quality) of these relationships, and what can be learnt and done to improve these relationships for the mutual development of both the local and the global (Oxfam, 2008: 3).

Conclusion

This article has argued that DE can help to build critical awareness of local and global development issues and, at the same time, contribute to democratic governance with nation states. With a consideration of the specific colonial context of African countries and the existing forms of DE in these countries, the article has sought to show how DE with its GCE agenda can meaningfully engage learners in active citizenship. But for DE and its global citizenship agenda to take root and make inroads in Africa countries, there must be some adjustments made to the methodologies and approach employed in the global North to address the historical, political and socio-cultural context of African countries. The article has also brought to the fore areas in which more research is needed to properly ground DE in the context of African countries. The ways in which neopatrimonial elements in African cultures can be targeted with DE programming is an area that needs exploration, as well as an investigation into the ways in which civil society is engaged in the promotion of DE activities in African countries. Research is also needed to assess the provision for learning about global issues and developing critical citizenship skills as part of the school curricula in African countries. This research could enable DE providers in an African context to develop learning programmes that are specific to the political, economic and social context of learners and attuned to the legacies of Africa's colonial history.

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